

Message Text

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70

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4293

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT UK

SUBJ: GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN: BROAD IMPRESSIONS

SUMMARY: IN A GENERALLY DULL CAMPAIGN, LABOR IS MAKING MOST OF THE RUNNING. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE UNCHARACTERISTICALLY BLAND AND LARGELY UNCONVINCING. THE LIBERALS ARE HOLDING THEIR OWN. DESPITE SOME LIKELY LOSSES TO SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS, THE LABOR GOVT STANDS A GOOD CHANCE OF SECURING THE OVERALL MAJORITY IT IS SEEKING.
END SUMMARY

1. BRITAIN'S SECOND GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN THIS YEAR IS SHAPING UP AS A RATHER DULL AFFAIR. PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING TOLD THAT
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AN ECONOMIC CRISIS IS AT HAND AND THAT UPON THEIR DECISION ON

OCT 10 MAY WELL DEPEND THE VERY SURVIVAL OF THE KINGDOM, BUT FOR THE MOST PART THEY ARE APPROACHING POLLING DAY WITH LITTLE ENTHUSIASM AND NO REAL CONVICTION THAT THE OUTCOME WILL SETTLE MUCH ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

2. THUS FAR IN THE CAMPAIGN, LABOR HAS MADE MOST OF THE RUNNING. IT HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON ITS SOCIAL CONTRACT WITH THE TRADE UNIONS,

AND DEFIED THE OTHER PARTIES TO COME UP WITH A MORE CREDIBLE APPROACH TO INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS OR THE CONTAINMENT OF INFLATION. IT HAS PROJECTED AN IMAGE OF MINISTERIAL COMPETENCE, SOCIAL CONCERN, AND SELF-CONFIDENCE. IT HAS DERIDED COALITION GOVT AS WEAK GOVT, AND BOLDLY ASKED FOR A SOLID WORKING MAJORITY.

3. THE CONSERVATIVES, BY WAY OF CONTRAST, HAVE APPEARED DIFFIDENT AND COLORLESS. THEY MOUTH PLATITUDES ABOUT THE NEED FOR NATIONAL UNITY, BUT ARE VAGUE ABOUT HOW THEY WOULD ACHIEVE IT. CLEARLY ANXIOUS TO DISPEL MEMORIES OF THE TOUGH, COMBATIVE STANCE THEY ADOPTED IN THE FEB CAMPAIGN, THEY ARE PULLING THEIR PUNCHES. HAUNTED BY THE DISASTROUS OUTCOME OF THEIR SHOWDOWN WITH THE MINERS, THEY HAVE ABANDONED MOST OF THEIR OLD POLICIES IN THE CRITICAL AREA OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND THUS FAR FAILED TO FORMULATE NEW ONES.

4. THE MAIN OBJECT OF THE LIBERAL CAMPAIGN IS TO BREAK UP THE CLASS-BASED TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN BRITAIN. ONLY BY VOTING LIBERAL, LIBERALS CONTEND, CAN THE ELECTORATE FORCE THE CREATION OF A BROADLY-BASED GOVT SUCH AS WILL BE NEEDED TO TACKLE THE IMMINENT ECONOMIC CRISIS. JEREMY THORPE REMAINS THE MOST POPULAR OF THE THREE PARTY LEADERS AND IS CONDUCTING A MUCH MORE ACTIVE CAMPAIGN OUTSIDE HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY THAN HE DID IN FEB. HIS "TEAM" IS BETTER KNOWN AND MORE EFFECTIVE THAN IT WAS IN FEB AND THE PARTY IS RECEIVING A LARGER SHARE OF MEDIA COVERAGE.

5. SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS ARE RIDING AN UPWARD SURGE OF POPULAR SUPPORT, BUT REPORTS CONFLICT AS TO WHETHER THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO HURT LABOR OR THE TORIES. THE MEN OF ULSTER, AS BEFORE, ARE SIMPLY FIGHTING A DIFFERENT ELECTION ALTOGETHER.

6. THERE ARE STILL TWO WEEKS TO GO AND ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN,
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BUT ON PRESENT FORM, THE WILSON GOVT STANDS A GOOD CHANCE OF SECURING THE ABSOLUTE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IT IS SEEKING.
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